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The Vision of the Madonna



OTTAVIO FREGGER.

BY GRACE L. SLOCUM

The Vision of The Madonna

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“For voices pursue him by day
And haunt him by night ;
And he listens and needs must obey
When the angel says, ‘ Write.’ ”

Longfellow

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THE VISION OF THE MADONNA.

I.

(MARY LOQUITUR.)

Methought an angel came to me and said,
"Fear not, thou hast found favor in the sight
Of God, and art among all women blest."

* * * * *

And then, as in a vision, I beheld
Time like a scroll unrolled before mine eyes.
Upborne, as if on angels' wings o'er earth,
I watched the swift flight of the burdened years,
With all the wonder and the suffering
And final triumph of the Holy One.
And first I saw below a bare, white plain
And shepherds watching by their flocks by night.
A wondrous light all round about them shone,
A path of glory leading up to Heaven,
That pulsed from rose to silver, as it were

The Vision of

A mighty heart-beat throbbing through the world.
Then down the path of light an angel came,
Clothed all in glittering raiment wonderful,
And to the startled shepherds thus he spake,—
“Fear not, I bring good tidings of great joy,
For unto you is born this day a King
In Bethlehem, a Saviour! Christ the Lord!”

* * * * *

Then from the star-lit deeps lo, hosts of Heaven
Sail in soft splendor down the sea of light,
Their wings all glistening with the sheen celestial,
As earthward swift they take their radiant flight;
While choiring seraphs lean o'er barriers golden,
And seraph harps still sound from Heaven's far height.

The air is all aquiver with the rapture
That overflowed from founts of joy on high;
All palpitating with the hues resplendent
Flashed forth from wings that beat adown the sky,
Soft emerald, rose and amethyst and golden,
That in a mist of splendor melt and die.

And all the night is filled with music glorious,
The startled shepherds' souls with rapture fill;

The winds are hushed, the stars bend low to listen,
And the whole world is wrapped in wonder still,
To hear the echo of that song proclaiming,—
“Peace on the earth, and unto men good-will!”

* * * * *

The light thrilled toward me, flamed beyond, I felt
The touch of angels' wings upon my brow ;
And lo, a strange, swift rapture stirred my soul
And all of thought and being merged in this,
That in mine arms I held a new-born Babe,
Whose eyes, all wonder-filled, gazed into mine ;
(A dream within a dream, yet not a dream,
But truth revealed. God's way!) I clasped it close
And earthward looked once more. And then, behold,
I, in the spirit, saw myself in flesh,
And in mine arms I held a new-born Babe,
And in my heart a voice said, “Lo, this is
The Christ-Child, the Messiah long foretold
By prophets to redeem the world from sin.”
And all my soul bowed down in reverence glad
Before this Godsent One, that yet was mine
By every sacred right of motherhood.
A radiant light lit all the lowly place,
Such light as mortal ne'er had seen before ;

And in the midst of that effulgence, soon
 Appeared three Wise Men from the Orient,
 Bearing rich presents from their teeming lands.
 Before the Infant Christ they humbly bow,
 Pouring their offerings at His sacred feet—
 Gold, frankincense and myrrh, and treasure rare
 As would befit the ransom of a King.

* * * * *

O'er the lowly manger bed
 Magi bent adoring,
 While the Star stood overhead,
 Wondrous light downpouring.

Guided by that new-born Star,
 O'er the desert faring,
 Came they from the East afar,
 Richest treasure bearing.

'Twas a child's cry wakened them
 From their mystic dreaming,
 And a child's hand beckoned them,
 In that new Star gleaming.

Low they bow in reverence,
 Him as Lord adoring,
 Gold and myrrh and frankincense
 At His feet outpouring.

* * * * *

And then lest Herod should the tidings gain,
 And slay the Child, the Wise Men went their way.

And in mine arms still smiled the Babe unharmed,
For they, His earthly guardians, warned of God,
Went into Egypt and abode a time
And came not back again till Herod's death.

And when the time was ripe—I saw Him come
For baptism unto one who cried, "Behold
The Lamb of God." And Him he did baptize,
And then a radiance hovered o'er His head,
Like to a dove with wings of lambent flame,
As if it were indeed the spirit of God
Come down from Heaven, to consecrate and bless.

Next saw I Him in wilderness afar
For many days communing with His God.
The nascent consciousness of that great power,
The heritage of His divinity,
O'erwhelmed His untried soul; though sore beset
With temptings from without and from within,
He would not use that power divine to stay
One pang of hunger, thirst or mortal pain;
That power supernal did He consecrate
To others' good, His mission high on earth,
And from the wilderness went forth to save.

The Vision of

I saw Him heal the sick, the lame, the blind.
They crowded round Him for a look, a touch
Of gracious healing or to list to words
With wondrous wisdom fraught; and once
O mystic miracle, O deed divine,
I saw Him raise the dead! at His command,
“Come forth!” as at the sound of the last trump,
The dead arose and stood before Him there.
And some who came to scoff bowed down to Him
And cried, “This is the Christ that was to be.”
And there were many who believed on Him
And followed Him throughout all Galilee.

And ever in mine arms I held the Babe
Close clasped upon my breast, and in its eyes
I read what things should come to pass on earth.

I saw Him at a feast in Simon's house,
A Pharisee! Who, though his bidden guest,
Yet with cold courtesy did welcome Him
Nor seated Him among the honored ones.
On sumptuous couches, they recline at ease,
On sumptuous couches, carved from cedarn wood,
Encrusted thick with gold and ivory,

O'erspread with rugs and silken cushions soft.
 The lights illumine the lofty banquet-hall
 From candelabra wrought of beaten gold,
 And antique cressets swung by golden chains
 From the high ceilings' gilded tracery;
 Soft lights that send back opalescent rays
 From walls inlaid with pearl and ivory,
 Or sleep in folds of golden fulness 'mong
 The woven arras, all of Tyrian hue
 And white, green, scarlet, worked with flowers of
 gold,
 With linen cords and rings of silver hung
 From fluted columns hewn of porphyry,
 Rose-flushed or vari-colored, and the rare
 Numidian marble tinct with rose and gold.
 Along the polished board of citron wood
 Gleam myrrhine vases, cups of ruby glass,
 Gold goblets all embossed with precious stones,
 And crystal beakers filled with sparkling wines
 And sherbets cooled in snows from Lebanon.
 The glittering canisters are filled with bread,
 The lustrous salvers glow with delicacies,
 And baskets of wreathed silver are heaped high
 With luscious dainties of the Orient:

The Vision of

Pomegranates with their glowing hearts of fire,
And grapes like globes of wine, and figs and dates
And lucent amber of the citron gourd.

Then in the midst of all the splendor came
A woman: who, unbidden to the feast,
Unheeding scornful looks or cold disdain,
(That she, polluted one, should enter there,)
Sought out the Christ of Galilee and bowed
In passionate adoration at His feet,
And on them rained her tears of penitence
And kisses warm from her great, fiery heart.
She flung the rose-wreaths from her beauteous head,
That erst adorned her for some revelry,
Unloosed the dusky splendor of her hair
And wrapped those dear feet in the silken warmth,
Anointing them with precious spikenard till
The air was heavy with that fragrance rare,
While on the mosaic floor unheeded now
The rose-veined shards of alabaster gleamed.
(Cold Pharisee, thou ill couldst comprehend
Such love as she hath lavished on thy Lord!
Nor couldst thou comprehend the gracious words
Of Him who spake as never yet man spake):—

The Madonna

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“I entered in thy house thy bidden guest,
Thou gavest me no water for My feet,
Lo, she hath washed My tired feet with her tears
And dried them with that wealth of unbound hair;
No kiss of greeting gavest thou to Me
But lo, she hath not ceased to kiss My feet;
Nor yet with oil didst thou anoint My head,
With precious nard she doth anoint My feet;
She hath loved much and is forgiven much.”

No scorn could hurt her now, for lo, the Master saith
unto her,

“Thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace, thy sins are
all forgiven.”

I saw Him as He walked in Galilee,
Teaching and healing as was e'er His wont,
Feeding the multitude upon the Mount
The while He taught them of the Bread of Life.

Thrilled the low music of His voice appealing,
“Come unto Me and I will give you bread,
Come unto Me, all ye that thirst or hunger,
Take, eat, with bread from Heaven ye shall be fed.

The Vision of

“Take thou no thought for what the morrow bringeth,
What ye shall eat or drink from day to day,
Your heavenly Father careth for the sparrows,
O troubled ones, are ye not more than they?”

“Is not the life more than the food or raiment?
Consider thou the lilies how they grow;
They toil not, yet are they arrayed in splendor,
Doth not your needs much more the Father know?”

Thrilled the low music of His voice appealing,
To every heart with sin and care oppressed,
“Come unto Me, ye that are heavy-laden,
Come unto Me and I will give you rest.”

I saw Him on the Sea of Galilee
Alone with His disciples in a ship,
Wearied and worn He lay in slumber deep,
Nor heard the rising wind, nor felt the spray,
Nor even roused when with fierce fury raged,
The storm upon the deep; no, not until
The cry of His disciples pierced His heart—
“O save us or we perish, Master, save!”
Then, rising, He rebuked them tenderly,

"O ye of little faith, why so dismayed?"
 And standing there in lowly majesty,
 His golden hair, His garments all wind-tossed,
 High o'er the roar of waters rose His voice
 Commanding, "Peace, be still," and all was still.
 Alike in far blue dome and calm blue deep,
 Like points of golden fire the great stars burned;
 And all their souls with awe and wonder filled.

* * * * *

"Peace!" and the wild waters rest,
 Cradling the ship on their breast
 Like a dove with its wet wings out-spread;
 "Peace!" and from fear-stricken hearts,
 All the wild terror departs
 And the stars shine in God's blue o'erhead.

"Peace!" lo, the waters have heard,
 Hushed are the waves at His word,
 All still rolls the turbulent sea;
 Bright gleam His garments afar,
 The light of His face like a star
 Shines out over dark Galilee.

Toilers o'er life's troubled sea
 Peace He doth give unto thee,
 O come unto Him, come and rest!
 Cease from your warring and strife,
 Turn from the doubts that are rife
 And lay your tired head on His breast.

The Vision of

“Peace!” for He knoweth thy need,
Over life’s billows He’ll lead
And whisper thy soul, “Peace, be still.”
So be fulfilled through all time,
That song of the angels, sublime
Of “Peace upon earth, and good will.”

II.

I saw Him in the midst of a glad throng
As He rode toward Jerusalem, and lo,
They lay their garments down and strew green palms
O’er all the way as for a conqueror.
And when the quiet hour of eve was come
I saw Him wend His way to Bethany,
Weary and worn, heart-hungry for a word
Of human sympathy from those He loved.
And one there was with wondrous, wistful eyes
That sought His face in love unquestioning,
Until her heart o’erflowed and on His head
She poured the spikenard, very precious while
Her tears fell with ’t, the chrism of love! nor knew
She did anoint Him for His burial.

I saw Him in an humble room, alone
With his disciples at the Paschal feast;

And when he blessed the simple bread and wine
And gave them, speaking solemn mystic words,
It seemed to them a sacrament divine
As He had given them of His very self.
And all their souls were filled with grief and awe
So great, they scarce could comprehend His words.
Then, lifting up His eyes to Heaven He prayed,
“ Oh, Father, glorify Thy Son! for now
I come to Thee, but these are in the world,
Keep through Thy name those whom Thou gavest Me
That they may be with me hereafter and
Behold the glory which I had with Thee
Before the world was! Not alone for them
But for all those who shall believe on Me
I pray, that they may all be one, as Thou,
O Father, art in Me and I in Thee.”

Then out into the solemn hush of night,
Beneath the olives' moonlight-silvered leaves,
They followed Him unto Gethsemane.

I saw Him in the garden praying long,
And heard the broken wail of agony—
“ O that thou wouldst remove this cup from Me.”

(And all my soul was wrung with anguish sore.
I could not see Him suffer so alone,
I came and soothed Him, though He knew me not,
But thought an angel ministered to Him.)

I saw Him on the way to Calvary!
And now mine eyes were blinded by my tears.
O sad, sad sight, to see Him led to death
By those He came to save! O blind of heart,
Ye blind who thought to see Him come a King,
As earthly conqueror, King of earthly realms!
And when He came at last in humble guise
His own, to whom He came, received Him not.
He was an-hungered, and ye gave no meat,
And thirsty, and ye gave Him naught to drink,
Sick and in prison, and ye came not nigh,
And now He goes to death! O faithless ones,
Who quail before that thought, do ye not know
That death is but a step to higher life
Where Christ, this Saviour of the world, shall reign?
Ye cannot see, but will ye not believe?
Ye saw the Star that heralded His birth
To shepherds watching by their flocks at night;
That led the wisdom of the East to lay

Its treasures and its worship at His feet;
 Ye saw the Dove with wings of silver light
 Come down from Heaven to rest upon His head;
 Ye saw Him heal the sick and raise the dead
 And still the tempest; ay, and there are some
 Who saw him all transfigured on the Mount;
 And still ye doubt, O unbelieving ones!
 He came to save you and ye mocked at Him!
 Know ye it is your Saviour ye have scourged?
 His blood be on your heads as ye have said.
 The end is not. I see behind the veil.
 Still in my arms I clasp my Babe and read
 Within its eyes, all deep with suffering,
 God's meaning underneath the mystery.

Once more I earthward turned my yearning gaze
 With prescience of a grief as yet unknown.
 I saw Him crucified! O cruel sight!
 And when uplifted there upon the Cross,
 I heard Him pray that prayer divine, "Forgive
 Them, Father, for they know not what they do."
 And yet they feared they knew not what, for lo,
 A gathering gloom obscures the noonday sky,
 A sudden tremor shakes the solid earth:

Then from the swaying cross there came a cry of
desolation,

“Eloi, eloi (my God, my God), why hast Thou Me
forsaken?”

And hearts that erst were hot with hate now thrill
with deep compassion,

And dumb with fear, enwrapt in gloom, they wait
the consummation.

They wait, and all creation waits the doom of its
creator

In breathless silence; then, once more, heard through
the thunderous darkness,

The Saviour speaks—“Into Thy hands I yield my
spirit, Father.”

And last a cry of ecstasy and triumph—“It is finished.”
Ay, finished! and the earth did quake, the heavens
did speak in thunder;

’Tis finished! and behold the temple veil is rent
asunder,

And rent for aye the veil that hid from mortal eyes
the Father,

’Tis finished, the Redemption of the world.

And lo, mine arms were empty! then I knew

The meaning of those words mysterious
That Simon spake, what time I brought the child
Into the temple to present Him there—
“The sword shall also pierce through thine own
soul.”

I stretched forth empty arms, in vain! a wave
Of mighty anguish swept across my soul.
Thou whom my mother heart had hoped to see
The ruler of His people, the Messiah
Who was to come, the chosen one of God,
My dreams, my hopes, my life, were all for thee!
Thou whom I used to hold close to my heart,
And whisper of the wonders of Thy birth,
And of the promised wonders yet to come,
In sweet communings in the twilight hour,
Here at Thy cross I bow in agony!
Almost the vision fails; in this blind hour
Brought face to face with woman's deepest woe,
Almost I doubt Thee, God omnipotent.
Yet, O forgive! each pang He suffered there
Has pierced my soul as with a sword. Yet still
My faith looks up to thee. Thou knowest all.
Still dimly through the veil I see thy truth
Clear shining as the sun, and know all things

The Vision of

Shall work together for the final good.

* * * * *

O aching hearts, be still
 And learn the Father's will
 That so on earth His name be glorified;
 O trusting hearts of earth
 That gloried in the birth
 Of Him who on the cross for your sakes died,
 Hold fast your faith upon His spoken word,
 Thine eyes shall yet behold the glory of the Lord.

While yet the soldiers kept
 Guard over Him who slept
 The whole earth trembled and my watchful eyes
 Beheld ere break of day,
 The great stone rolled away
 By angels winging from the waking skies;
 While yet afar came Mary Magdalene
 And others, knowing not what wonder there had been.

Ere yet the night was spent
 Unto the tomb they went
 All sorrowful for Him their souls adored;
 Bearing rare spices hence
 Myrrh and sweet frankincense,
 To anoint the precious body of their Lord;
 But lo, He whom they sought, mighty to save,
 Hath won the victory over death—and o'er the grave!

* * * * *

For as I watched (O vision glorious
 That floods my being with the light of truth,
 Uplifts my fainting heart to heights serene

Where in the great light of God's infinite love,
 My spirit breathes the breath of the divine
 And yearns to be at one with the Eterne!)
 I saw Him standing by the sepulchre
 My Babe, my Saviour, and my risen Lord!
 Transfigured with the glory all divine
 Before which angels bow.

With one low cry

Of grief and rapture blent, "Rabboni, Lord!"
 She with the sad, sweet eyes, who loved Him so,
 Knelt at His feet there sobbing passionately,
 Till at His bidding she arose and went
 Her way to Galilee with swift, glad feet,
 To tell the joyous tidings, "Christ is risen."

Aye, He is risen indeed, and my stilled soul
 Is filled with rapture all unspeakable!
 Thou who fulfill'dst thy mission unto death,
 O not in vain thine anguish, not in vain
 Thy triumph over sin, death and the grave!
 Thy words prophetic time shall yet fulfil—
 "Lo, I, if I be lifted up, will draw
 All men unto Me." Ay, and they shall learn
 To look to Thee and live, to drink Thy cup,

The Vision of

To die for Thy name's sake, their faces lit
With peace divine reflected from Thy face!
Yea, in Thy name shall mighty domes be built;
And at Thy name all hearts shall bow the knee
And worship Thee in love and unity.
Then from Thy throne of glory Thou shalt see
Of Thy soul's travail and be satisfied,
For all the world shall own Thee Lord and King.

* * * * *

“My soul doth magnify the Lord, behold
In God, my Saviour, hath my spirit rejoiced;
For He, the Lord, He that is mighty, hath
Regarded His handmaiden's low estate,
And unto me done great and wondrous things;
And holy is His name! behold, henceforth
All generations me shall call blessèd.
His mercy is on them that fear His name;
With arm of strength He doth resist the proud;
He hath put down the mighty from their seat
And hath exalted them of low degree;
Lo, He hath filled the hungry with good things
And empty hath He sent the rich away;
Lo, He hath helped His servant Israel
In the remembrance of His covenant,

As He spake to our Father—Abraham
And to His seed forever.”



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